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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MASERU 000403

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USAID/DCHA/FFP ALSO FOR WHAMMINCK, JDWORKEN, TANDERSON,
LPETERSON, SGILBERT
USAID/DCHA/OFDA ALSO FOR CPRATT, KLUU, GGOTTLIEB, AFERRARA
USAID/AFR ALSO FOR ELOKEN, LDOBBINS
PRETORIA ALSO FOR USAID PDISKIN, JWESSEL, HHALE, NMANGQALAZA
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TAGS: [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: DISASTER DECLARATION: FOOD INSECURITY IN LESOTHO

REF: MASERU 402; MASERU 199

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11. This is an action cable. See paragraphs 3 and 11.

SUMMARY

12. SUMMARY: According to a variety of food experts, Lesotho government officials, and official observers -- including USAID, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the GOL's Disaster Management Authority, and local and international NGO communities -- persistent drought and failed crops since December 2006 and subsequent hikes in commodity prices have created an increasingly acute food crisis in Lesotho. On average, Lesotho's total agricultural production declined over 40% this season, increasing food insecurity for upward of 500,000 people (roughly 25% of the population). The situation is worsened by Lesotho's high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, creating groups highly vulnerable to fluctuations in food availability. This year's abnormally poor harvest, particularly with regard to maize, a staple crop for subsistence and for household income, requires food aid in order to prevent a crop disaster from becoming a humanitarian crisis. See ref B for further detailed information on the harvest and drought situation.

13. On July 9, Lesotho's Prime Minister issued a statement on the "Declaration of an Emergency on Food Security" and called on the country's "development partners and all the friends of Lesotho to assist us to address and redress this situation." On May 28, the GOL's Disaster Management Authority issued a report stating that an estimated 523,000 individuals are in need of food aid in Lesotho due to the 2007 crop failure. A joint WFP/FAO Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM) report issued on June 11 estimated that 30,000 tons of cereals and 6,700 tons of other foods would be necessary to close the food insecurity gap faced by Lesotho's vulnerable groups. It is in the U.S. Government's interest to provide food aid in this instance on humanitarian grounds. As such, this cable serves as a disaster declaration for severe food insecurity in Lesotho, and the U.S. mission in Maseru requests that USAID/OFDA provide Chief of Mission authority to use \$50,000 for emergency assistance. Specific funds will be requested when an appropriate local recipient and activity has been selected. Post commends USAID/FFP for commodity contributions to WFP over

the past two months and also supports any additional increases in Title II emergency food aid resources. Post requests that USAID/OFDA and USAID/FFP work with USAID's local food aid partners in Lesotho (CRS, World Vision, and CARE) to determine any additional support that may be necessary to assist in crop failure recovery and improved food security until a successful harvest can be realized. Post fully supports this NGO consortium's recent proposal for a one-year extension of the C-SAFE program (ref A). END SUMMARY.

Previous USAID Conclusions

¶4. USAID Food for Peace (FFP) and Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) Teams visited Lesotho on three occasions in recent months to conduct food and crop assessments and to monitor ongoing assistance programs: November 12-15, 2006; April 18-21, 2007; and March 19-23, 2007. Following the most recent visit, the teams arrived at the following conclusions (reftel): (A) failed rains since December 2006 have resulted in a crisis situation in Lesotho; (B) the FFP program, subject to the availability of funds, should consider an initial call forward of emergency commodities to Lesotho; (C) The food aid programs of the WFP and the Consortium for Southern African Food Security Emergency (C-SAFE, an NGO consortium including Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, and CARE) which currently target chronically-vulnerable caseloads might be redirected to meet the acute (shock-related) needs of Lesotho's population; and (D) the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) should study the water situation and explore options to address water constraints in the short and medium term to support agricultural recovery for the spring/summer season to enable affected households to plant and harvest in March/April 2008. During the first week of June, USAID/FFP enacted an emergency contribution to WFP Lesotho of 6,500 metric tons of food aid commodities, valued at US \$5 million. In early July, USAID/FFP enacted a further contribution of 3,750 metric tons of food aid, valued at \$2.93 million. (NOTE: Due to a lengthy

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shipment pipeline, however, these commodities will take months to reach Lesotho. END NOTE.)

Significant Impact; Beyond GOL's Resources

¶5. The current crop failure in Lesotho will have a significant effect on lives and livelihoods in the Kingdom, and it is beyond current local resources to respond adequately. According to Lesotho's Disaster Management Authority (DMA), 2006/2007 maize production in Lesotho is down by 39% as compared to 2005/2006 (also a drought year), and sorghum production has declined by 42% during the same period. On average, Lesotho's total agricultural production has declined 40.5% this season. The price of maize is expected to rise in Lesotho between 50% and 100% this year. The DMA estimates that 523,351 people (approximately one quarter of Lesotho's population) may be in need of between 30,000 and 35,000 tons of food aid. The magnitude of this need is beyond the current resources of the Government of Lesotho.

¶6. The week of April 23-30, an FAO/WFP team conducted a validation Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM). According to a May 18, 2007 report by the FAO Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division, the DMA's above estimation of maize and sorghum crop percentage declines were accurate. FAO noted that as Lesotho only produces about a third of its cereal requirements even in a good year, this reduction has serious implications for the nation, especially the poor and most vulnerable groups. FAO also remarked on a recent 25% rise in maize meal prices. According to the report, the estimated planted area for maize is down 13.3 percent this year; sorghum planted area is down 16.3 percent; and wheat planted area is also down, by 16.4 percent. Livestock forage supplies were

predicted to be in deficit due to lower supplies of maize and other crop residues.

¶7. The FAO/WFP's official CFSAM report was issued to the GOL on June 11. As 2006 was also a drought year, the report emphasized the scale of Lesotho's crop failure as compared to the nation's five-year average agricultural production figures. By this measure, maize production had declined by more than 50%. The report noted that many households had exhausted their coping capacity, and that the escalation of grain prices due to domestic shortages and rising maize prices in South Africa would further limit the access to market-purchased supplies by landless and urban populations, deepening food insecurity.

¶8. A delegation from C-SAFE also conducted an assessment mission on April 19-20, 2007. This mission reached substantially similar conclusions to USAID/FFP and FAO/WFP, and the C-SAFE consortium submitted a concept paper for informal feedback to USAID/OFDA on a spring/summer planting program. Embassy Maseru fully supports the consortium's proposal for a one-year extension of the C-SAFE program (ref A).

Food Aid Welcome

¶9. On July 9, Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili declared a food disaster in Lesotho, specifically citing DMA, WFP, and FAO statistics to support his conclusion that a "critical situation of food insecurity" exists in Lesotho. The Prime Minister stated that the "Government [of Lesotho] requires increased assistance from its development partners in order to translate into action plans for addressing the food insecurity situation in the country." Mosisili, describing the declaration as a short-term measure to alleviate famine among vulnerable socio-economic groups, stated that the GOL will take measures to ensure national food security in the future, including: identification of agriculture as a the key sector in the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy; improvement of agricultural productivity through maximum use of arable land, subsidized inputs, promotion of drought resistant crops, and scaling up of homestead farming/gardening; promotion of block farming, conservation farming, and water control; and establishment of "Range Management Areas."

¶10. The nation's Disaster Management Authority had previously announced that international food aid is needed to avert crisis. The DMA's most recent report, issued on May 28, reflected the GOL's understanding of the severity of the situation and its

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desire for international food aid. Underscoring this desire for international cooperation, DMA added USAID's April 2007 Southern Africa Food Security Update as an appendix to its report.

Aid in the U.S.'s Interest

¶11. Post concludes that it is in the interest of the United States Government to provide food assistance in this instance. As stated above, the GOL, through its Prime Minister, has publicly called on development partners to provide the nation with food aid. In addition to the primary concern of preventing a humanitarian tragedy, timely food aid would likely bolster the already flourishing U.S.-Lesotho bilateral relationship. The Government of Lesotho has been highly cooperative in facilitating U.S. food assistance. Any new USG aid would be accompanied by appropriate Public Diplomacy efforts to maximize the local public affairs impact of the donations.

Indeed a Disaster, Action Needed

¶12. The Charge d'Affaires, a.i. hereby declares a disaster in

Lesotho and requests that USAID/OFDA provide Embassy Maseru with the authority to use \$50,000 for the immediate, urgent need to mitigate a sharp increase in food insecurity. Specific disbursement of funds will be requested when an appropriate recipient and activity has been selected. Post also supports any increase in Title II emergency food aid resources, as possible. Post requests that USAID/FFP work with USAID's local food aid partners in Lesotho to determine any additional support that may be necessary to assist in crop failure recovery and improved food security until a successful harvest can be realized next season.

¶13. Embassy Maseru is currently exploring the use of this \$50,000 authorization to provide existing USG partner(s) with small grants to aid Lesotho's most vulnerable groups in the current crisis. In addition to C-SAFE, several NGOs collaborating with the USG's PEPFAR Presidential Initiative, who are undertaking food security programs with Lesotho's most vulnerable victims of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, are possible partners in this emergency food security effort.

¶14. The Mission will continue to monitor the evolving situation in Lesotho, and expresses thanks to USAID for its continued support and coordination.
MURPHY